

A tragedy for Alaska Natives

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During this past week, the Native community suffered a devastating loss in the untimely death of Ivan P. Gamble of Angoon.

Ivan's passing is a tragedy for Native people, not only because in his brief time on earth he managed to accomplish so much, but because he had so much more to accomplish. Indeed, who among us can say how far he might have gone?

It is also a personal tragedy, as he left behind his beloved wife Jeanne and their son Ivan Jr., as well as his parents Andrew and Mathilda. Just days before his death, Ivan spoke of his joy at being able to spend time with his wife and son, a pleasure which came to them all too infrequently. He will be sorely missed by his family and by his many, many friends.

And it was a tragedy in the utter senselessness of it; that a young man with so much to offer and with so much of his life ahead of him, could be taken from us by an act of random violence.

Ivan was a man who impressed and inspired all who knew him. In his home in Angoon, he was president of his village corporation and a volunteer coordinator for many local programs.

He endeared himself to the people of his region through his work with the ANB Grand Camp and the Tlingit and Haida Central Council. He also was known and respected for his work with the Alaska Federation of Natives, both as a member of the 1991 Steering Committee and as the representative for Southeast villages to the Statewide Village Board.

Ivan was only 20 when the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was passed in 1971, but he soon distinguished himself in the eyes of Native leaders, and his name was often mentioned as the foremost example of young adult leadership in the Native community.

He was a man of character. He knew who he was, and he never forgot where he came from. His goal was a worthy one: he only wished to improve the fortunes of his people. He never lost sight of that end.

When Ivan took a position on an issue, you could be sure that he believed in what he said. He was thoughtful and intelligent, and he did not take his responsibilities lightly. Perhaps that was why he was respected so widely, why he was able to serve his people in so many different ways.

We mourn Ivan's passing, not only for what he was, but for what he might have become. His selfless efforts have touched us all in some way. Others will now take his place to serve the people he loved. We will endure. But we will never, ever forget our love for Ivan or his for his land and his people.